

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Wanted...Mud Blossom by Betsy Byars

## Book Information

Betsy Byars, Wanted...Mud Blossom  
Quiz Number: 5095  
Bantam Books, 1991  
ISBN 0-385-30428-5; LCCN  
148 Pages  
Book Level: 4.2  
Interest Level: MG

Convinced that Mud is responsible for the disappearance of the school hamster that he was taking care of for the weekend, Junior Blossom is determined that the dog should be tried for his "crime." Book #5

**Award:** Edgar Award/Honor Book

**Topics:** Animals, Dogs; Animals, Hamsters/Guinea Pigs/Gerbils; Family Life, Misc./Other; Mysteries, Lost Items; Series, Blossom Family

## Main Characters

Dump Junior's dog, who is not liked by Mud and is on his jury

Junior Blossom the youngest of the Blossom children, who brings home the class hamster for a weekend adventure

Maggie Blossom Junior's older sister, who uncovers a "mystery" when she finds a bag and cane by the side of the road

Mary Cantrell (Mad Mary) an elderly woman who lives alone in a cave, considered by Junior to be his best friend

Michael a good friend of Vern's

Mud Pap's dog, who allegedly eats the class hamster and has to stand trial

Pap (Alex Blossom) grandfather of the Blossom children, who becomes involved in the "mystery" when he can find no trace of his friend Mary

Ralphie a friend and admirer of Maggie Blossom who spends most of his time thinking about Maggie

Rooney Vicki Blossom's new boyfriend, who is a "horse detective" for insurance claims

Scooty the class hamster, who becomes lost and is presumed to be dead

Vern Blossom Junior's older brother, who tricks Junior into believing the hamster had been eaten

Vicki Blossom mother of the Blossom children, who looks forward to a weekend visit from her new boyfriend

## Vocabulary

**absentia** not present or attending

**malnutrition** a condition that arises from eating inadequate amounts or types of food

**prosecute** to pursue for punishment of a crime

**verdict** the decision of a jury in a trial

## Synopsis

Junior Blossom can hardly wait to bring home the class hamster for the weekend. He has spent a whole day digging tunnels for Scooty to explore, but he hasn't thought much about Grandpa's dog, Mud. When Scooty is missing and all the evidence points to Mud, Junior and the Blossoms decide to hold a trial for him.

In the meantime, Maggie Blossom and her friend, Ralphie, find by the roadside a bag and cane that belongs to Mad Mary. Mary Cantrell is the strange old woman who lives in a cave and eats varmint stew. Maggie is certain that Mary would not abandon her bag or cane and begins to fear something has happened to her. After some investigating, Pap Blossom discovers that Mary was taken to the hospital after passing out. Luckily, she does not suffer a serious injury and is soon cleaned up and released into Pap's care.

Mud's trial has a happy, if not surprising, ending when Ralphie produces a key piece of evidence--Scooty! Vern Blossom and his friend, Michael, think they will get the last laugh with their little prank, but Junior ends up dishing out their sentence. In fact, Junior's weekend proves to be quite exciting all around, with plenty of laughs along the way.

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## Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

### Initial Understanding

Why did Junior hold back a bit although he was bursting to tell Pap about his surprise?

*He was concerned about Mary and felt guilty about being happy.*

### Literary Analysis

What did Maggie suggest when she said the class guinea pig came back a different color?

*She suggested that her classmate had bought a new guinea pig after something happened to the "real" one, instead of admitting the truth.*

### Inferential Comprehension

What did Junior mean when he said, "I'm doing this not only for myself, but for Mary as well"?

*He felt he was defending his friend. He did not like Vern and Michael making fun of Mary and harassing her.*

### Constructing Meaning

What do you feel is likely to happen after Mary is released from the hospital?

*She will likely take better care of herself after her brush with the "angel of death." She may also accept help and friendship from others rather than scaring everyone away with her looks and manners.*

## Teachable Skills

**Making Inferences** In *Wanted...Mud Blossom*, Mud shows many expressions that convey his feelings. Have the students find pictures of people or animals showing some sort of expression and write a paragraph for each photo interpreting the expressions and venturing a guess as to what may have caused them.

**Making Predictions** Have the students continue the story by writing an adventure for Scooty once he gets to Rebecca's house. The students may either use the original style of dialogue or write the adventure in the form of diary entries.

**Describing Actions or Events** Conduct a mock trial, similar to Mud's, in the classroom. Have the students read the local newspaper for police reports, traffic accidents, or headline news and choose a recent event in order to construct a trial. There should be enough details given in the article for students to "create" a feasible scenario. The students can then be divided into a defense team, a prosecuting team, and a jury. Evidence can be presented by both the defense and the prosecution, and it will be up to the jury to arrive at a verdict based on the evidence presented.

**Recognizing Feelings** Have the students write an original poem using the point of view of one of the animals from the book (Mud, Dump, Scooty, or the possum). They should try to create a certain feeling or mood in their poems through their word choice and format.